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HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

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"HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE," "HOW GOD INSPIRED THE BIBLE,"
"THE ANCIENT DOCUMENTS AND THE MODERN BIBLE"

LIBRARY OF
Theological Seminary
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41,696

LONDON:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON & CO., LTD.

13670 The Evangelical

PREFACE.

It is with deep diffidence that I make this little attempt at teaching people how to read their Bibles. I am only learning how to read my own Bible: only groping and guessing my way. But I know as a Bible reader the difficulties in that way, and I know as a pastor some of the causes that hinder people everywhere from enjoying and profiting by their Bibles as they might. With these I have tried to deal. May it be my reward that some few at least shall learn to read their Bibles with more interest and enjoyment as well as with more profit through the means of this little book.

In two of the sub-sections I have used the thoughts and sometimes even the words of a larger book of mine already published, but this was unavoidable, as I had to deal with the same subjects.

J. P. S.

Christchurch Vicarage, Kingstown,
July, 1896.

CONTENTS.

PART PAGE

I. INTRODUCTORY ESSAY 1

II. HOW TO THINK OF THE BIBLE . . . 17

1. The Divine Library.
2. Given through Human Minds.
3. Not written Originally for us.
4. Its Teaching Progressive

III. ON STUDYING WITH THE MIND—INTELLIGENTLY 53

1. On Taking Pains.
2. On "Putting Yourself in his Place."
3. On Using our Common Sense.
4. On Using our Moral Sense.
5. On Studying by "Texts."
6. On One-sided Truths.

IV. ON STUDYING WITH THE HEART—DEVOTIONALLY 107

1. Devotional Study.
2. "Acquaint thyself with God."
3. "He that Willeth to do, he shall Know."
4. Study Regularly.
5. Study Practically.
6. Study Prayerfully.

PRAYERS 127

WE SEARCH THE WORLD FOR TRUTH: WE CULL
THE GOOD, THE PURE, THE BEAUTIFUL
FROM GRAVEN STONE AND WRITTEN SCROLL,
FROM ALL OLD FLOWER FIELDS OF THE SOUL;
AND WEARY SEEKERS OF THE BEST,
WE COME BACK LADEN FROM OUR QUEST,
TO FIND THAT ALL THE SAGES SAID
IS IN THE BOOK OUR MOTHERS READ.

Whittier:
"Miriam."

PART I.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

I.

GEORGE ELIOT, in "Romola," attempts to depict an abnormal specimen of humanity—a man without a soul. He has intellectual faculties keener and more powerful than any of his fellows, but he is utterly destitute of the spiritual faculty—the Soul, the Conscience, the Moral Sense—call it what you will—the faculty by means of which men perceive rightness or wrongness, moral beauty or deformity, in actions or words.

I refer to this in order to emphasise the broad distinction between intellectual and spiritual perception. In all practical study, whether of the Bible or of the facts of daily life around us, we must exercise the two distinct powers, the Intellectual and the Spiritual, the Mind and the Conscience. By the one we apprehend TRUTH

AND FALSEHOOD; by the other we apprehend RIGHT AND WRONG. Whether at bottom they should be regarded as different faculties, or merely as different exercises of the same faculty, is a metaphysical question that need not concern us here. We are at least conscious of a distinction between them as definite as that between Sight and Taste. As Sight can perceive an apple on the table but only Taste can discern whether it is bitter or sweet, so the Intellectual faculty can take cognisance of certain teachings or doings, but only the Spiritual can recognise their moral beauty or deformity.

In writing about the study of the Bible the province of these two faculties must be clearly distinguished, although in their working they are so closely combined. The Intellectual has to take cognisance of the facts and to ascertain their relations to each other. And while it is thus with clear cold gaze moving amongst the facts of sin, and penitence, and faith, and self-sacrifice, and the dealings of God in relation to men, the other faculty moves beside it, tasting, as it were, the quality of those facts, keenly sensitive to

whatsoever things are "pure and lovely and honourable and of good report," vibrating responsive to beautiful deeds and thoughts as an Æolian harp to the wind.

For example, in reading, say, the close of St. Luke's Gospel, the mind apprehends clearly the sequence of the events and their relations to each other, the story of the Last Supper, the midnight scene in Gethsemane, the seizure of Jesus, and the trial, and the crowd on the hill of Calvary watching through the long hours of His dying, and listening to the last words which He spake.

And side by side with it, almost interwoven with it as it were, goes the Spiritual perception, feeling the beauty of His tenderness for the disciples, admiring His calm dignity, rousing our enthusiasm for the nobleness of His self-sacrifice, bringing the tears into our eyes for His sorrow and His pain, bowing our hearts in adoring love responsive to that love which could bear all for our sake.

Now it is most important that *both* these faculties, the Intellectual and the Spiritual, should be diligently exercised in the study of the Bible.

If either be neglected the result will be but error and confusion. A very godly man who is stupid and illogical will make very great mistakes about the meaning of the Bible. A very clever man who has no enthusiasm for righteousness will see in the Bible nothing but an ordinary book. Two things therefore are requisite if the Bible is to be really interesting and profitable to us. It must be read—

I. WITH THE MIND—INTELLIGENTLY.
II. WITH THE HEART—DEVOTIONALLY.

In other words, there must be clear, careful *thought*, and there must be earnest, devotional *feeling*, and either of these will not suffice without the other.

§ 2.

The first of these I desire especially to emphasise, not that it is by any means the more important of the two, but that it is much the more likely to be neglected, and that its neglect is the chief reason why many earnest readers of the Bible fail to find in it the interest and enjoyment which they desire. It is not too much to say that there is scarcely

any widely read book so unintelligently studied as is the Bible by the great bulk of its readers, even by those who really love it; that if people were to study any other portion of literature on the same methods as many study their Bible, we should certainly not expect them to find much interest or profit in such study.

Let me illustrate this. Before me lies a collection of English books :—

KING ALFRED'S LAWS.
THE SAXON CHRONICLE.
GROSSETESTE'S LETTERS.
THE CANTERBURY TALES.
STRYPE'S ANNALS.
LATIMER'S SERMONS.
MILTON'S PARADISE LOST.
THE LIFE OF WYCLIFFE.
ENGLISH BALLAD POETRY.
NEALE'S HISTORY OF THE PURITANS.
THE IDYLLS OF THE KING.
BINGHAM'S ENGLAND UNDER THE HOUSE OF LANCASTER.

Now if I take these books one by one in their rightful order, if I place each in its true historical setting, if I find out what I can about the object of each, the contemporary history, the customs and modes of thought of the people, if I try to

think myself into the feelings of the poets and chroniclers, and into the position of the various characters referred to, I shall have a very interesting and profitable study in English history and literature.

But suppose this case instead. An educated community—say in China—receives this collection of books. They first translate them into their Chinese language, rendering all, history and poetry alike, into one uniform prose, and printing them in any order one after another in a single volume as if they had been parts of the self-same work from the beginning. Next, for convenience of reference, being a very methodical people, they cut up the whole into a thousand sections of uniform length, dividing it often without very much regard to the sense, and then take to reading these sections straight through without any inquiry about the writers or the circumstances of the time or the people about whom they were written; without any distinction between one author and another, between prose and poetry, between the eighth and the eighteenth centuries.

Would this, think, you, be a very intelligent method of study? Would the methodical daily reading over of these thousand sections again and again give very clear ideas about the teaching of these books?

It seems to me, reader, that we have little cause to smile at such a method of study. There has come down to us in the Bible a collection of ancient literature ranging over a period of 1200 years. It consists of different books written at different times for different people, under different circumstances and often with very different purposes. It embraces every variety of composition —History, Biography, Letters, Sermons, Poetry, Drama. Some of the books were written in time of war, some in peace and prosperity, some in the hopeful founding of an infant church, some in righteous anger at a nation's sin. They are largely coloured, too, by the character and circumstances of the various writers—the calm statesman—the fiery warrior—the enthusiastic poet—the young priest consecrated to God from his childhood—the world-weary old king to whom all things seem vanity — the rustic unlettered provincial — the

broad-minded cultured scholar—the stern denouncer of the wrath of God, and the gentle prophet spirit sorrowing lovingly over his faithless wife, and thus learning God's pity for his faithless country.

Surely it must be clear to any one that for the intelligent study of such a literary collection, it is necessary to discriminate between the different books—to consider the time and the circumstances under which each was written—to remember that they were not originally addressed to us, but to other people—to learn all that is possible about the history of each—and thus try to understand, to get in touch with, to put ourselves in the place of the ancient authors who wrote and the ancient peoples who received each of these books long ago.

Perhaps some readers may demur to this conclusion and say, "The study of the Bible is quite a different matter from the study of secular history and literature. The Bible is to be regarded as the teaching of God Himself, not as that of a number of separate human authors. It reveals the eternal truths of God's love to man,

God's hatred of sin, the eternal contrasts between Righteousness and Unrighteousness, Obedience and Disobedience, Purity and Lust. It is God's announcement to poor sinful men that He is ready to help them when they are weak, and to raise them when they are fallen, and that He is a thousand times more concerned for their salvation than they are themselves. So that, it may be said, it is a matter of no consequence as to the order of the books, or the surroundings of the writers, or the connection in which these truths were taught to their original recipients."

There would be force in this objection if God's inspired teaching had come down to us in certain formal propositions such as

GOD LOVES MANKIND.
GOD HATES WRONGDOING.
GOD RULES IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN.
GOD FORGIVES WHEN MEN REPENT.

If the Bible were thus a series of separate texts and statements, each a complete truth in itself, incapable of being misunderstood, and needing

no qualification, then it would probably matter little when, or how, or by whom these statements were first communicated, or under what circumstances they came to their original readers. We should only need to go to our Bibles just as we should go to a medicine chest and pick out the correctly labelled little packet of truth suitable for our present needs, with no concern at all about its date, or its writer, or the connection in which it was originally given.

But this is not at all God's method in Revelation. Not in complete texts and proverbs, not in golden aphorisms or finished creeds, but through the medium of history, and dialogue, and poetry, and drama, through the story of men's lives and troubles, and the cries of noble souls struggling towards the light, does He vouchsafe the glimpses of His truth to men. From the incidents of the patriarchal history, from the story of the Jewish kingdom, from the fervid utterances of prophet and psalmist, from the intercourse of Jesus Christ with the Judean peasants, and the letters of His apostles about various questions of interest to the early Church—from all these sources men *have to*

form for themselves their ideas of God and of His will towards man.

Surely it is very possible to form these ideas wrongly if we do not study the Bible intelligently, taking into account all the various circumstances above referred to—in fact, if we do not study the Bible just as we should study any other similar collection of writings. Now see what has been done instead. First our ancestors have taken these varied books, poetry and history and prophecy alike, translated them into uniform English prose, bound them into a single volume, often quite out of their proper order, and arbitrarily divided them into chapters and verses, not always with very much regard to the sense. Then some of us, their descendants, have taken this volume as if it had been always one book from the beginning—as if, clasped and covered complete, it had dropped down from Heaven, like the image of the goddess Diana. We read its sections straight through, the first chapter of Job after the last of Esther, the beginning of Isaiah after the end of Solomon's Song. We do not stop at the beginning of each to say, "Here is an entirely

new book, written by a man of different character, written for different people, under different circumstances, and probably with quite a different purpose from the last that I have read. What can I find out about all these things? How can I best understand and enter into the feelings of the writer and the readers, and the various characters mentioned in the book?"

There is a certain amount of mental effort necessary for this, and most of us are rather lazy where mental effort is required. And so there has grown up amongst us an indolent, unintelligent method of Bible reading. We are content to read mechanically through our daily portions of Scripture to find nice texts and pet passages here and there, and to apply them piously, according to our own notions, without troubling to find out what exactly that ancient writer whom we are studying was likely to have had in his mind, and how exactly he meant those ancient readers of his to understand his words. And thus we lose much of the interest and the profit of our Bible reading, and are, in a large measure, frustrating the method and purposes of God.

§ 3.

So far for the first requisite—clear, careful thinking, studying *with the mind*, intelligently. There is less need of dwelling on the second, studying reverently, devotionally, *with the heart*, since its necessity must at once be evident to all.

It is altogether for the sake of its spiritual teaching that the Bible has been given, in order that the Divine life within us may be nourished by its words. There is in every man a something higher than his carnal passions, higher than his intellectual powers, a spark of the Divine nature which remains to humanity, like the white rose which in the Arab legend Eve is said to have carried away with her out of the garden of God. This spark of the Divine may be fanned into a flame by the breath of the Holy Spirit, or may be dulled almost to extinction by neglect and by sin. In the worst of men it will break out at times in admiration for what is generous, or unselfish, or brave. In the man in whom it has been developed by the power of the Holy Ghost, it becomes the noblest, grandest

thing the world can show — a God-possessed human soul. And it is especially for the purpose of this development that the Bible has been given. Therefore the right moral attitude is of such transcendent importance. Though the Intellectual aspect of Bible reading must not be ignored, yet the Spiritual is by far the more important of the two. Such is the peculiar property of God's Word, that the stupidest and most unintelligent reading, if done in a faithful, devotional spirit, cannot fail to win much blessing, whilst the wisest and most critical study without honest desire for the guiding from above, is utterly useless for the edifying of the soul. We must insist on the importance of intelligently exercising the mind in studying the Bible ; but we must always remember that it is especially to the heart that its teaching is directed, and that it is only in so far as it influences the heart that it accomplishes the purpose for which God has given it. Therefore must our Bible reading be above all things reverent and devotional, with earnest prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with unbiassed heart seeking only to

find God's will with the honest purpose of doing that will when we have found it. Thus only will it be really profitable ; thus only will it lift us up towards God ; thus only rouse in our hearts that love and trust and enthusiastic devotion to Him that will make our religion the very joy of our lives.

In the following pages it is intended to develop the thoughts suggested by this introductory essay, dealing separately with the Intellectual and Spiritual sides of Bible study, or, rather, since they are not capable of actual separation, beginning with one, the Intellectual, and shading off gradually into the other.

PART II.

HOW TO THINK OF THE BIBLE.

I.

THE DIVINE LIBRARY.

It was a very suggestive title that St. Jerome in the fourth century gave to the collection of sacred books, the Divine Library (*Bibliotheca Divina*). It indicates both the diversity and the unity of Scripture, suggesting on the one hand the idea of the different, separate, often unconnected books, and on the other that of the unity of spirit running through them all and forming them into a perfect whole. It reminds us that the Scriptures are "*manifold* by the variety of times and circumstances in which the several parts had their rise, yet *one* by the inspiring presence of the same spiritual life."

In ancient times the manifoldness was the prominent thought. The ancient Jews had no

singular name for the collection, nor for centuries any thought of it as a perfect and completed whole. Even our Lord and the apostles quote the Old Testament as the Writings, the Scriptures, or sometimes as the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. In our day this manifoldness is almost forgotten. We have got so accustomed to see all the different treatises bound up together between the same covers, and the whole collection called by a singular, not a plural, name,[1] that we naturally think of the whole as one single book. We need the frequent reminder that this collection of literature which we call the Bible is not one book, but a library of separate books, written at different times, by different authors, for different readers, and often with widely different purposes. There was no thought in the minds of the in-

[1] About the fourth century A.D. Greek writers came to use the term "The Books" (*Biblia*, plural) for the Bible. In process of time this name, with many others of Greek origin, passed into the vocabulary of the Western Church; and in the thirteenth century by a happy solecism the neuter plural came to be regarded as a feminine singular, and "The Books" became, by common consent, "The Book" (*Biblia*, singular), in which form the word has passed into the languages of modern Europe. Westcott's *Bible in the Church, Introd.*)

spired writers that they were preparing a Bible for all the ages. Each wrote for the temporary passing circumstances of his time. The prophet uttered his burning words to rouse or rebuke or comfort the people of his own day. The letters of the apostles were called forth by the passing troubles and occasional wants of one or another of the early Churches. As far as the intention of the writers was concerned, the books were for the most part as separate and unconnected writings as that collection of English literature which has been already referred to.

Now, for the intelligent study of the Bible this view of it must be well kept in mind. We must try to acquire the habit, when beginning any fresh book, of thinking of it as a separate work, and inquiring as to the period to which it belongs, the character of its author, the sort of people for whom it was written, the purpose of the book, and the peculiar circumstances, if any, that called it forth. This habit will be a considerable help to a right understanding of the Bible. In the Epistles and the Poetical and Prophetical books it is especially important, and even

where, in the case of some particular book, we are quite unable to satisfy our inquiries, the very effort to do so will help us towards the right mental attitude for understanding the book.

Gradually, too, this view of the Bible will force upon us a stronger and more abiding conviction of its Divine origin. When we see in the darkest ages of the world these books arising one by one, distinct from all other books, infinitely superior to the spirit of the time—when we see many different writers, often with hundreds of years between them, without any designed connection with each other, without any thought that they were writing the great Lesson Book of Humanity —and yet their separate works when brought together forming a complete definite whole, as if written by a single hand, a perfect system of teaching with all its parts harmonising with and supplementing each other—the conviction must grow stronger and more constant within us that such things do not come by chance, that these separate workers must have wrought upon a perfect plan, invisible to themselves, which was traced by the finger of God.

II.

GIVEN THROUGH HUMAN MINDS.

"THE Law," said the old Jewish rabbis, "speaks in the tongue of the sons of men." And it were better for the Bible had the Jewish rabbis, and their Christian followers too, kept that fact always clearly in mind. For a great deal of the *naturalness* of the Bible has been lost, owing to the rigid theories which have so long prevailed, and which have made men afraid of recognising the human element in Scripture.

No candid, thoughtful student can study the phenomena presented by the Bible without finding in it a decidedly human element. If he be afraid of it and try to ignore it, the Bible becomes a puzzle to him. If he reverently recognise it the Bible becomes more simple and beautiful. But however he may treat it, it is there all the same.

The very idea of inspiration implies it, for the inspiration of a book is the result of contact between the Spirit of God and the human mind and conscience of the writer. The Bible itself, too, reminds us that they were *men*, holy MEN, who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And as we turn to read it we find a large part of it taken up with the expression of feelings that are distinctively human, loneliness and sorrow, hope and fear, impatience and anguish. We call it all the Word of God, and in one sense rightly, as being all inspired of Him. But we must see that it is in a great measure the word of man as well—the cry of the child in appeal to his Father, the prayers for help, the doubtings and questionings, the yearnings after the Unseen God. The writers express feelings just like our own, and we constantly acknowledge it. Is it not a large part of the charm in such a book as the Psalms that it accurately expresses what we ourselves have felt over and over again? And how utterly unnatural it becomes if men insist on reading such utterances as if they had no human

element in them, as if they were something dictated from outside by God, with none of the writer's personality in them at all! It is evident, too, that in many other respects the inspired books resemble ordinary uninspired works. The language and composition are not always of the highest order. Each writer has his own peculiarities of thought and style, his own peculiar excellences and defects, like any modern writer. The historian had to make his books as do our own historians to-day—he had to gather his information from old registers and chronicles already existing, from his own observation and memory, from the report of those about him. The writings, too, are often tinged by the ideas of the time, and the author's scientific knowledge seems often circumscribed by the same horizon as that of his contemporaries.

If, then, we would rightly enter into the minds of the inspired writers of Scripture, we must not think of them as mere passionless machines, as merely the "pen in the hands of God" who dictated the books, as merely the "lyre which

was played upon by the Holy Spirit." We must think of them as *men* giving expression to the thoughts and feelings stirring within them, men with like weakness and passions as ourselves, though purified and ennobled by the influence of the Holy Spirit—men, each with his own peculiarities of manner and disposition, each with his own education or want of education, each with his own way of looking at things, each influenced differently from others by the different experiences and discipline of his life. Their inspiration did not involve a suspension of their natural faculties. It did not destroy their personality nor abolish the varieties of training and character. It did not take all the naturalness, all the humanity, all the passionate impulses out of them. It did not make them into machines. It left them *men*.

To say all this is not to put a slight on the Bible, as some people seem to think, any more than it would be a slight on the earth to say that it is not a perfect sphere; it is but to explain it, to show the truth about it, to make it better

understood. It is no honour to the Bible to ignore its human side, to insist that the writers were only God's machines. Rightly understood, the presence of the human element should increase instead of lowering its value as a book of religion for men. God used human minds as the channels of His truth probably because thus it could be better received and assimilated by the human minds to which it came. He used the men best fitted for each country and each age. He inspired various characters and temperaments. He chose men of different tones of thought to present the different aspects of His many-sided truth, and thus to supplement the teachings of each other.

So, too, the Divine Spirit came to men at various crises in their lives. He came to them in joy, in sorrow, in doubt, in despair, in the confidence of faith, in the fierce struggle with temptation. Through the human spirit in its varied states He spake to the universal human spirit as it could never have been spoken to otherwise. He spake through the passionate indignation of Isaiah and the sorrowful plaints of Jeremiah over

the wickedness of his race. He touched the hearts of the ancient Psalmists, and we hear the sounds of the struggle with their sin and their childlike crying after the living God. He inspired the stern pathos of Hosea sorrowing over the greatest trouble that could come to man—a wife unfaithful to her marriage vow—and by means of his sorrow and his changeless love learning Jehovah's feelings towards His unfaithful people.

If, then, God has thus used human minds in order that He might more fittingly communicate His teaching to men, it is evident that the ignoring of these human minds can only be a source of confusion in our study of Scripture. How can the student understand the letters of St. Paul, so full of the writer's personality—how can he enter into the minds of the Psalmists, or the questions of Job feeling after a solution of the mystery of life—what clear meaning can he attach to expressions of sorrow and indignation and penitence and prayer—if they are all to him mere words dictated from outside, in which the writer had no part except to say them or write

them down? In some portions of the prophecies, indeed, the spirit of the prophet is so possessed by the Holy Ghost that the human seems scarcely to come into action at all. But this is not sufficient for an exception to the rule that there can be no true and intelligent study of Scripture where the human mind of the writer is ignored.

How much clearer and simpler and more natural would the Bible become to us if we habitually thought of it thus in connection with its human writers, recognising how beautifully God has used them for His purpose! How touchingly would come to us in its pages the cry of the human spirit in its ever-changing moods if we recognised it as the cry of a human spirit like our own not ceasing to be human when inspired by the Holy Ghost! With what interest we should watch men struggling with temptation or questioning of the mysteries of life around them (I refer here especially to the Old Testament writers) if we felt that they were imperfect men like ourselves, in whom God's great work of teaching and character-making was only in progress—men who

were being ennobled by the Spirit of God and inspired by Him to speak for the teaching of humanity, but who under His influence uttered naturally the thoughts and aspirations stirring within them, not some words dictated to them mechanically from on high!

When we met with psalms of the warlike ages that seemed not gentle and loving enough for the spirit of Christianity, how we should sympathise with the stern, indignant patriots as *men* roused to a Godlike indignation at the cruelty and oppression and hypocrisy around them! We should think of similar cases in modern history, as of the godly men in the Indian Mutiny, whose fierce prayers went up to Heaven as they saw the helpless children impaled on bayonet points and the outraged women crucified against the walls. And our sympathies would go back to these ancient men living under the influence of the Divine Spirit in the dark ages of the world—men willing to lay down their lives for their country and their God, whose fiery warrior instincts cried for vengeance on the hypocrite

and the oppressor as the only way to sweep hypocrisy and oppression from the earth.

And when we turned to read the Epistles of St. Paul (thinking of them by the homelier title of "letters"), how we should feel ourselves getting in touch with the great, large-hearted old man who in a very passion of the "enthusiasm of humanity" was willing to lose his heaven for the sake of his people![1] As we studied reverently the deep truths that God had imparted to him we should sympathise with the quick play of human feelings which he exhibits. And things would seem to us quite natural and fitting that puzzle other men in the God-inspired writings—his impetuous outburst, "I speak as a fool"; his mention of the cloak left behind at Troas; the little messages of remembrance to the old friends who loved him just such as we should write ourselves in a letter to-day.

And instead of lowering the Bible in any way for us, these things would teach us how sweetly simple and natural is the operation of God in the

[1] Rom. ix. 3.

inspiring of His teachers. No fierce, convulsive disturbance of their lives, no maddened eyes nor frenzied shouts, but the power Divine coming upon them, as upon nature around us, quietly, gently, "not with observation."

God forbid that any words used here to promote naturalness and reality in the study of the Bible should detract from the deep reverence with which it should be regarded! It is necessary in our day to emphasise strongly the human side of Holy Scripture. It is the side which up to this has been most ignored by religious people, and the ignoring of it has tended to make Bible reading uninteresting and unreal. But in guarding against this error of under-estimating the human there is possible a far worse error—under-estimating the Divine. We must protect ourselves carefully against that. While recognising to the full the human medium through which the Divine has come to us, we must always remember that it is only a medium, that that which is beneath and behind and within it is the power of the Spirit of God.

We cannot draw a line between the Divine and the human. We cannot say of any part, This is Divine, or that is human. In some parts, as the Gospels, there seems more of the Divine; in others, as the Chronicles, more of the human. It is as sunlight through a painted window. The light must come to us coloured by the medium. We cannot get it any other way. In some parts the medium is denser and more imperfect; in others the golden glory comes dazzlingly through. The light cannot be separated from the tint given by the medium. Every ray is mingled light and colour. It is foolish to ignore the existence of this medium. To do so but leads to misunderstanding and disquiet and wonder that the light is not absolutely pure. But how much more foolish to ignore the light and deem that the tinted dome is luminous in itself, that the light of heaven has only come from earth!

Let every student of Scripture be here on his guard. The more he habituates himself to read his Bible naturally and sympathetically, recognising fully the human side of it, the more neces-

sary it is to remember with reverence and awe that God is, in the truest sense, its author ; the more he recognises the personality of the writers, the more needful to keep in mind that the writings "came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

III.

NOT WRITTEN ORIGINALLY FOR US.

REMEMBER in reading any particular book that it is not you, but other and different people, that the writer or speaker had originally in view, though Divine inspiration has so influenced the book as to make it also suitable for you and, in varying degrees, for all classes of men in all ages of the world. There is no reason to think that the inspired writers knew of God's design of a great Lesson Book for all mankind. For the most part, each of them wrote for the people and the circumstances of his own time. One had before his mind a host of liberated slaves about to become a nation; another a set of prosperous hypocrites and formalists who were forgetting God; a third was thinking of the crowd of sorrowful captives in Babylon. St. Paul wrote

one letter to an earnest young clergyman,[1] who was to him as his own son; another to the master of a runaway slave;[2] another to a congregation of impulsive Celtic people[3] who were vexing and disappointing him. When reading these epistles, remember it was not you, it was this young clergyman—this owner of the slave—these troublesome converts—that he had before his mind when writing. Therefore you had better keep them before your mind when reading if you want to enter thoroughly into the feelings and thoughts of St. Paul. Do not read as if all the letters had been addressed originally to yourself. Try to think what the words would mean in the mind of the writer and of the original receivers. It will give a new interest to the writings; it will prevent their becoming monotonous to you; it will help you to understand their meaning; it will reveal to you the significance of many little touches which otherwise you would entirely miss; it will help to keep you from misquoting Scripture in a sense which the

[1] Timothy. [2] Philemon. [3] The Galatians.

writers never intended ; and perhaps, too, it will impress you with awe for that Divine inspiration which has made these occasional utterances of ancient days the text-book for ever for the guidance of man.

At the same time, of course, it must never be forgotten that He who inspired the minds of the writers is He who can see the end from the beginning, and who designed that the words addressed to the old-world men should be helpful to all men in all ages to come. What was said to the obstinate or the penitent or the troubled or the faithful in ancient days is for the obstinate and the penitent and the troubled and the faithful in our days as well. Psalm and prophecy and history and epistle are to be applied to ourselves when the circumstances correspond. Christ's words to the disciples and to the mourners belong to disciples and mourners still. His words to the little children belong to our little children. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

IV.

ITS TEACHING PROGRESSIVE.

Of all the difficulties which can confront the student of the Bible, the most formidable is that which arises in his mind when some of its utterances seem to him to fall below the level of the enlightened Christian conscience. He finds in the Old Testament usages permitted which would not be sanctioned by the civilisation of England to-day; he finds sentiments expressed—as, for instance, in some of the Psalms—which he feels could not win the approval of Christ. And inevitably the disturbing question must come to him, if he be an honest, fearless thinker, "How can these things be inspired of God?" Some time since a devout Christian lady, an earnest student of her Bible, came to the writer with an anxious mind.

A sceptical friend had been trying to disturb her faith in God and in the Bible. He showed her how slavery was permitted in the inspired teaching, and plurality of wives, and how a man was allowed to put away his wife by merely giving her a writing of divorcement. He pointed to the prophetess pronouncing her benediction on the bloody treachery of Jael, and the Psalmist uttering prayers for vengeance on his foes. "And that," said he triumphantly, "is the God of your devotion, that is the Bible which you speak of as inspired!"

This is but an ordinary instance of the evil of reading these things without understanding them. Thousands of earnest Christians are every day having their faith in God and in the Bible disturbed by such difficulties. In olden days the evil was, if possible, even worse, when, instead of seeing these things to be wrong, and wondering that they should be attributed to God, men with less instructed consciences received these utterances of the ancient ages as God's teaching for themselves; when polygamy and slavery were

justified by the example of the patriarchs; when poor innocent women were burned as witches on the authority of a verse in Leviticus; when the bloody slaughters of the Crusades and the atrocious massacre of St. Bartholomew were hailed by loud Te Deums in the churches, and compared to the zeal of Old Testament days.

Surely it is necessary that readers of the Bible should learn how to regard these difficulties. They have no need to be frightened by them as though they were destructive to their faith. They have no need to slur them over, and try to forget them. It needs but a looking at them from the right point of view; it needs but a true understanding of the object of Scripture, and these bogies will vanish away from us like ghosts in the daylight.

§ 2.

What, then, is this right point of view, and how shall we attain to it? The right view is the historical view of the Bible, and the way to attain to it is by thinking of the world as the great

school of God, where gradually, patiently through all the ages He has been training humanity for nobleness of life. The Bible [or rather the Old Testament, for it is there mainly that these difficulties come in] is to be regarded not as a series of perfect precepts equally applicable to all men in all ages of the world, but rather as the story of God's *gradual* education of man. We must remember that what is true of the development and education of the individual, is equally true of the development and education of the race. The individual man is capable of continual development from the cradle to the grave. Now this is equally true of the race as a whole. There is a capacity for continual development, each generation incorporating into itself the results of the preceding generation's growth. So that we may picture to ourselves the human race as a COLOSSAL MAN, whose life reaches on for thousands of years. The successive generations of men are days in this MAN'S life. The discoveries and inventions of the different epochs are HIS works. The creeds and doctrines and

principles and opinions are HIS thoughts. The states of society at different times are HIS manners. HE grows in knowledge, in self-control, just as we do. And HIS education is in the same way, and for the same reason, precisely the same as ours.[1]

Now think of God through all the ages educating this human race as we have to educate a little child to-day. Then think *how* we have to educate the little child. We have to recognise the necessity of gradual growth and gradual development. We know that we must begin at the very lowest rudiments, that very crude and imperfect conceptions must satisfy us at first. Though all the glory of the highest knowledge is before the child, he can only partially receive it until his mind has grown. And so we have to begin at the A B C, and to go on and wait on patiently for many days and months and years till the gradually developing mind achieves at length the full knowledge that we had aimed at for it.

[1] See Bishop Temple's Essay, *The Education of the World.*

The same thing is true of our attempts at moral and religious training. Place a wise, judicious man at the head of a slave mission in Central Africa, over poor creatures gathered in from slavery and savagedom, and with all their evil habits strong upon them, with drunkenness and impurity and murder and revenge amongst the ordinary incidents of their previous life. He will, doubtless, try to reveal to them the loveliness of Christianity, which is so apparent to himself. But, as in the case of the child referred to, though this highest knowledge is before them, they cannot yet appreciate or comprehend it. Even the noblest minds amongst them can but dimly grasp such ideas as the duty of self-sacrifice, of loving their enemies, of chivalrous reverence for women, of lofty faith and sweet adoring love and perfect consecration of the life to God. As for the bulk of his converts, if he can even impress upon them that murder and theft and drunkenness and adultery are sinful, he may consider himself for the time very fairly successful.

And if he be a wise man he will not be sur-

prised or greatly disappointed at this, remembering the law of gradual development. He will at first tolerate much of which he really disapproves. He will overlook much that grieves him. He will rejoice at any little sign of effort after good, even though it be still largely mixed with evil. Lovingly, prayerfully, hopefully he will watch over his people in his slow, patient system of education. He will be content to move slowly, to win his way by almost imperceptible degrees, willing even to wait perhaps for many years for appreciable progress in the path of right. He will give his approval to acts which for these poor savages really mean progress upward, though to the Christian world at home they seem worthier censure than praise. He will daily pray for his degraded people that God would "cleanse the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." But he will believe that the presence of God's Holy Spirit does not necessarily imply the absence of all error and wrong-doing, that it necessarily implies only the possession of some truth, some life, sometimes very

little truth and life indeed. And thus believing he will patiently wait, teaching, praying, hoping still.

By and by, when some of these converts have grown into noble, high-minded Christian men, trying to follow closely the steps of the Crucified, will they not look back on the early training and the early notions as on a lower stage that they have long since passed, and yet will they not confess that this lower stage was a necessary part of their progress upward to the full Christian life?

§ 3.

Now let in the thought of God's great school and His pupil, whose school-days are thousands of years. Remember that this pupil, this great human race, has had to be taught just like the poor blacks in our illustration, slowly, gradually, step by step, as it could bear it. Remember that the faults of the Old Testament are the faults not of the teacher, but of the pupil, the necessary result of the pupil's limitations.

Then think of the Old Testament as an account of this training, or rather of part of it, presenting views of the pupil now and then at different stages of his progress, and see if, regarded from this new point of view, things do not begin to settle into their places. It tells us of one nation chosen out from all the rest, not for its own sake, but for the good of the whole; for unless you think of God as just and impartial and caring for all men, you never will understand your Bible at all. It tells us how this special nation was trained, how the impulses of the poor degraded slave race coming out of Egypt were checked and guided and chastened and elevated by a slow and gradual process; how God watched over them as the refiner of silver over the crucible, slowly and patiently "purging their dross and taking away all their tin."

It tells of His plan of progressive education like that of the ideal teacher in our illustration; how many things in the early stages were overlooked or "winked at," as the Authorised Version badly puts it;[1] how slavery was not at once swept

[1] Acts xvii. 30.

away, but its cruelties forbidden and its abuses checked; how divorcing of wives was not absolutely prohibited, but laid under stringent regulations so that it could no longer be a mere matter of careless whim; how the wild national customs of revenge were kept in check by the use of the cities of refuge, giving time for the moderating of the avenger's passion.

It shows how the kindly spirit of gentleness and forbearance and care for others' interest grew gradually into their legislation by the inspiring of the Holy Ghost.

It shows that their idea of God was often crude and imperfect like that of our own children when their teaching has but begun. He was great and powerful, greater than all gods; He loved righteousness, He hated iniquity; but He was regarded often as only the national Deity of Israel, not seeming to care for other nations beside. Yet there are glimpses of fuller truth in His care for Nineveh, in His dealings with the Arabian Job, and especially in His word to this the most exclusive race in the world, that in the promised

seed "should all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gradually the horizon widened with the prophets. But it was not until after the coming of Christ that the old imperfection was finally done away, and Jehovah was revealed as the Father of all men, the God who "willeth all men to be saved."

Thus in this law of gradual progress we find the key also to others of the difficulties referred to We find actions allowed or mentioned without blame which we in the purer light of Christianity would regard as blameworthy, deeds of mingled good and evil, in which perhaps the evil has allowances made for it owing to the evil circumstances of the time. We find in the Psalms the lofty moral teachings and burning aspirations after God and holiness now and then marred by the fierce prayer for punishment on the wicked. They are the prayers of stern faithful servants of God claiming that God would vindicate His justice. But it was in an age that expected God to vindicate it in this life. It was in an age that did not clearly distinguish between the sin and

the sinner, an age when moral indignation and hatred of villainy showed itself in invoking vengeance on the villain as the enemy of the God who hates all villainy.

We must remember that we are judging men in the lower stages of the patient Divine building up of the kingdom of God on earth. We must remember, like the missionary teacher in our illustration, that the influence of the Holy Spirit does not necessarily imply the absence of all error and all wrong-doing, that it implies necessarily only the possession of some truth, some life in those on whom it acts. We must recognise the fact that the coming of Christ made an enormous difference to humanity, and that much less is to be expected of the earlier world. "The Law was given by Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ." There is therefore a childhood and youth and manhood of the human race. The men of the earlier ages were but as children compared with us. They required a lower and more elementary teaching, less demand upon their self-control, more allowance to be made for their

failures and their sins. They were in the lower classes of the great school of God.

Remember how clearly our blessed Lord states this difference between the older teaching and the new: "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, BUT TO FILL UP"[1] [that which is deficient]. And in accordance with this He goes on: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not forswear thyself."[2] But *I* give you commandments more advanced than these. Again, "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But *I* say unto you that ye resist not evil.[3] Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But *I* say unto you, Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you.[4] Moses for the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives. But *I* say unto you that he who

[1] Matt. v. 17.
[2] Ibid. v. 21, 27, 33, R. V.
[3] Ibid. v. 38.
[4] Ibid. v. 43.

putteth away his wife except for fornication committeth adultery." And again, when the indignant disciples wanted to call down fire, "as Elijah did," upon those who had slighted their Master, they were plainly taught that even this great prophet of the Old Dispensation was no sufficient example for Christians under the New ; that they belonged to a higher stage in the spiritual education of man.

Let us then read the Bible with this historical view of its meaning and purpose, and many of its moral difficulties will inevitably disappear. Let us study the Old Testament always in the light of Christ's teaching, and wherever it falls below His standard regard it as an earlier and more elementary stage in the gradual education of the race. The lower lessons of lawgiver and prophet must yield to the fuller, higher teaching of their Lord. Like a parable comes to us the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter wished Moses and Elias to remain, and the Voice from Heaven came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, hear ye *Him*."

PART III.

ON STUDYING WITH THE MIND—INTELLIGENTLY

I.

ON TAKING PAINS.

"YES, I do read my Bible every day. But, to be honest with myself, I must confess that my reading is more a duty than a pleasure, that the daily paper, the newest story, almost any other reading is more interesting to me. I heartily wish my Bible were a source of interest and pleasure, but for the most part it is not, and sometimes it seems to me as if it were not quite my fault—it seems as if I could not help it."

Such is a frequent thought with many of us who are regular readers of the Bible. Perhaps there is something to say in excuse for us. There is the disinclination of the natural heart to occupy itself much with the things of God, there is some-

times the over-familiarity with the words of Scripture, and perhaps the association of them with disagreeable task-work in our childhood. But at the same time it must be clearly understood that the remedy is largely in our own hands, that the interest and pleasure of Bible reading can be had by all who will give prayer and pains to attain it.

I shall have to speak later of the necessity of prayer, let me here dwell on the need of painstaking study. There seems a tacit assumption in many minds that Bible study differs from all other study in this—that anybody, learned or unlearned, diligent or careless, can without effort win its treasures for himself. At any rate nobody would think of studying any other important treatise in the same indolent way in which men often study the Bible.

Let me picture the kind of reader that I have in mind. He is an earnest, pious Christian who regularly reads his daily portion of Scripture. But like many people he is rather indolent as to mental exertion, or perhaps he has never seriously

thought how his Bible ought to be read. He is now at, say, part of the Epistle to the Galatians. He has been reading St. Paul's epistles straight through as if they were all one treatise, as if the first chapter of the Galatian epistle were written as a continuation of the last chapter to the Corinthians. He has made no attempt to get into touch with the writer or the original readers, or to think what the words before him may have meant to their minds. He begins each day at the beginning of his daily chapter. Quite possibly, owing to the faulty chapter division, this may begin in the middle of an argument, or in some way may not be at all the logical commencement of the subject discussed. So he reads over the first few verses, feeling rather hazy as to what the apostle is writing about. As he has read the previous chapter in the same hazy way, he never thinks of looking back to find the connection. He reads his passage over and over, and spends as much time as would have enabled him, with a little well-directed mental exertion, to get a fair grasp of what the writer had in view. Finally,

he puts away the book content (or not content) with culling out one or two special texts. Certainly that is something gained. But it is all that he has gained, whereas he ought and might have learned whatever important truth St. Paul in this whole passage before him was inspired to teach. Then, after years of this so-called study we have the weary complaint that the Bible is uninteresting, and that he gets little profit from it, just as if he were in nowise to blame for this himself.

Every sensible man must know that no book worth anything can be studied in this way. The fact is that we have to decide each for himself whether we think the interest and the profit that we desire in our Bible-study is worth paying something for in trouble and attention. A man can get a slight vague knowledge of his Bible by the ordinary indolent methods, but it can never be an interesting book to him, and it can never be really understood. The Bible requires serious attention and diligent systematic study if it is to be enjoyed, and if it is to be of much help in the making of character for time and for eternity.

We must each decide whether it is worth this to us, but let there be no doubt that it demands this. It has rich gold to be mined for, but only the stray particles lie scattered on the surface. It has the priceless gift of the Water of Life, but men must take the trouble of digging if they would gain it. God offers His best treasures for our *acquisition*, not for our mere idle, lazy acceptance: not even sincerity and piety will win the treasures of His Word without honest labour expended on the pursuit.[1] According to the labour expended (if rightly directed) will be the value gained. "He that soweth little shall reap little, and he that soweth plenteously shall reap plenteously." And it is possible to reap very plenteously. It is possible, by earnest attention and careful, reverent study, to make the Bible not only a most profitable, but a most interesting book.

Let me picture another reader of this epistle to the Galatians. He does not read it as if it had

[1] "They searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so, *therefore* many of them believed" (Acts xvii. 11).

been written to the Corinthians. He remembers that it is another epistle written to different people for a different purpose, and under different circumstances. He feels at once that he must try to get in touch with the writer and his original readers, that he must try to find the main drift and purpose of the epistle, the circumstances which called it forth, and the place in St. Paul's history where it seems best to fit in. He looks through the Acts of the Apostles to find out what connection St. Paul had with these Galatians, and anything else that can be found out about them. Then he reads over the whole epistle rapidly two or three times for a general view of it. He notices at once its severe, indignant tone. He notices that the writer is vexed and discouraged about something in his converts, that he charges them with fickleness towards himself and towards his gospel, that he speaks of false teachers disturbing and deluding them. In the early chapters he seems to find it necessary for some reason to assert his position and to tell, as if in self-defence, the story of his life and his conversion ;

then two chapters are occupied with a discussion on Justification by Faith. Perhaps this is all that strikes our reader on a first or second rapid perusal of the whole epistle. But this is sufficient to rouse his interest and curiosity. He has a simple commentary by him giving the result of many thoughtful scholars' examination of the subject. Turning to this for some help and suggestions, he finds reason to believe that after St. Paul had left Galatia his constant opponents, the emissaries of the Judaizing party, had come proclaiming (as in the case recorded in Acts xv.), "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved." In thus opposing St. Paul's gospel they had found it necessary to deny his authority and apostleship. They declared him inferior to the other apostles, and charged him with inconsistency in his teaching. And these fickle converts in Galatia who had been so quick to help St. Paul now seemed to be equally quick to desert him, so that the whole future of Christianity in that region seemed to be in jeopardy. With this key our reader turns back again to his

perusal of the epistle. Now he sees easily the drift of it all. The first two chapters are St. Paul's assertion of his apostolic authority, and a denial of inconsistency. The next two contain a restatement and proof of his gospel of God's free justification, and an enforcement of a firm stand against these mischief-makers, and against all legal and ceremonial corruptions of Christianity. After this comes his affectionate advice about their lives as Christians, closing with another touch of that soreness which is evident throughout against those men who "constrain you to be circumcised."

The whole letter becomes now full of life and interest. The reader begins to enter into it with pleasure and zest. He begins to sympathise with the indignant, sore-hearted Paul. He is touched by the little indications of his discouragement and his sensitiveness. He is impressed with his affectionate care for these undeserving Galatians. Above all, probably his spirit is roused in keen sympathy as he enters into the warrior spirit of the apostle flinging down his defiance in the

battle for the truth. For a daring letter is this letter to Galatia. What it meant to Athanasius, what it meant to Luther, to clash against the strongest prejudices of Christians of their day, that it must have meant to Paul, when the authority of Moses and the opinion at Jerusalem and the strong feeling of his Galatian converts together confronted him, and he had to stand up alone against it all. All this must rouse the interest of the reader. Perhaps, too, when he has learned that these *Galatae* are of the same race as the Celts and the Gauls, he may be further interested in tracing the similar characteristics springing from their common Celtic blood, the warm affections, the quick impulsiveness, the proneness to change, and it may be, too, the disposition to drunkenness[1] and to fighting[2] amongst themselves.

Now that his interest in the epistle is roused he can proceed to learn its teaching in detail, to read it more carefully chapter by chapter. He will not begin a new chapter without looking back to

[1] Gal. v. 21. [2] Ibid. v. 15.

the previous one any more than he would begin at the third page of a letter without turning back to the second. He will keep always in touch with the writer, and with the drift of the epistle. He will concentrate his attention on the meaning intended. He knows that St. Paul had a definite meaning in every sentence, and he will set himself to find out what that meaning was. He will study the marginal references to trace out connections with other epistles and other books of the Bible, knowing that the best commentary on Scripture is Scripture itself. If unable to read Greek, he will keep his Revised Version always beside him. Whatever its faults it will not only give freshness of expression, but it will place him as nearly as an English version can do on a level with the reader of the original tongues. And, as he thus reads, at every step new light will break in on him. His study will be a pleasure instead of a task. This epistle can nevermore be to him dull and uninteresting, it is like a fresh new letter just seen for the first time.

All this is of course but preliminary to the main

object of his study, the prayerful search after God's character and God's will and God's feeling towards men. But it is an important, almost an indispensable preliminary. I have selected what to many readers is, perhaps, the hardest and least interesting of the letters of St. Paul; I have not told the half of what may be done to make it vivid and interesting. Let no reader reply that he has not time for such painstaking study. He ought, if possible, to make more time for it. But if he cannot there is no need of hurrying. Let him take a month if necessary to master this one epistle. One book thoroughly studied is worth a dozen books superficially read; and each book so studied will whet the desire and strengthen the habit of studying the other books with similar care.[1]

[1] There is much to be said in favour of steady systematic reading according to a calendar by which the portion for each day is definitely fixed. Yet as a rule one can seldom do very thorough study by that way *alone*. Perhaps for some readers it would be well to combine it with the method here recommended,—to read, say, in the morning according to a calendar, and at night to aim at the slower and more thorough study of certain special books as suggested above.

II.

ON "PUTTING YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE."

WHY does a mother read with flushed and tearful face the tale of a woman's self-sacrifice for her child? Why is there such intense interest for a schoolboy in a graphic story of adventure? Because unconsciously, without effort, the imagination is going forth, living in the scene, experiencing every feeling of the actors, obeying that law which is the great secret of pleasurable reading—PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE. Now if one take pains to acquire the habit it is always possible to do this in some degree at least; not always indeed unconsciously and without effort—sometimes it requires a good deal of effort, especially in books so familiar to us as are those of the Bible. But it is worth all the effort it costs. The amount of interest in reading any part will

depend greatly on our success in thinking ourselves into the place of the persons concerned, not merely in picturing the outward scene, but also, in so far as may be, entering into the minds of the speakers and actors. True, a greater imaginative power will give one man an advantage over another, but all that is really needful for success is some little knowledge of the circumstances and surroundings, and the effort to think oneself thoroughly into them.

Of course this is easier in some parts than in others. It is easy, for instance, in reading about Elijah, to put yourself in his place in his indignant wrath against Ahab at Naboth's field, or in his mocking exultation over the prophets of Baal. It is easy to feel the pathos of Moses' farewell, to put yourself in the place of Deborah in the joy of her triumph, or of the big, mischievous giant with the gates of Gaza on his back, laughing at the surprise of the outwitted Philistines. The historical books of the Old and New Testament are full of such scenes, and any man who will exercise his imaginative faculty has material for the most vivid

pictures. But what I desire to emphasise is, that not only here, but all through the Bible it is possible to add a keen interest to your reading by this effort to "put yourself in his place." Think, for instance, in the early prophecies of Isaiah of a vacillating king and an evil-living people, of the rumours in the city of approaching invasion, and the solemn sight of the prophet in his haircloth robe proclaiming the Divine message that burned within him. In the Gospels try to enter into the feelings of the formalist Pharisees and the jealous scribes and the ignorant people from the slums of Jerusalem, and above all of the great loving, sympathising heart of Him who understood them all. Try as you read the epistles of St. Paul to put yourself in the place of the writer, with his sensitive, highly-strung nature, now glad, now despondent, now vexed and dissatisfied at the conduct of some church, but always with every thought full of loving loyalty to his Master.

Get into the habit of thus exercising your imagination, making use of an easy popular commentary for the necessary information to enable

you to do so, and you will soon find your Bible gaining largely in vividness and meaning and interest.

And do not think that the gain is merely in the vividness and literary interest of the books, though even that would be of great importance. The more you enter into the circumstances of the story, and into the feelings and thoughts of the writers or actors, the nearer you will have come to the spiritual meaning which God designs you to learn.

In this connection it may be well to remind the reader that as far as he can he should try to read each book in its proper setting. The books of the Bible, like any other books, are of course best read in the light of contemporary writings. Psalm or Prophecy or Epistle will gain not only in vividness and interest, but also in clearness, if there be called up beside it the living person of the writer or speaker, and, as far as may be, the scenes and circumstances in which he moved ; and the vividness and clearness thus gained will be reflected back upon those scenes

and circumstances, so that they too shall be the richer thereby.

Thus, for example, we are told that Isaiah's prophecies were uttered "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (Isa. i. 1). It is evident that we shall best understand and get into sympathy with Isaiah by first reading the story of those kings, and trying to think ourselves into the position of the prophet when he was uttering these discourses. So, too, with Hosea, Micah, Joel, and Amos, who all belong to the story of the kings. If you would think yourself into the position of Zephaniah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, place them in their proper setting just before the history of the Captivity. As you read the pathetic story of the Return of the Exiles in Ezra and Nehemiah, and find that two prophets named Haggai and Zechariah were helping to encourage and stir up the people, turn to that part of your Bible where those men's utterances are recorded, and you will find new interest aroused both in their prophecies and in the story.

So in the New Testament also, the Four Gospels make one group to be read together—St. Paul's Epistles should be read in connection with his biography in the Acts of the Apostles—St. John's Gospel with his Epistles—St. Peter's Epistles with the chapters in the Gospels and the Acts telling something of his life and his preaching. A little thought thus exercised in arranging a course of study will add very considerably to the pleasure and profit of our Bible reading.

III.

ON USING OUR COMMON SENSE.

"GRANT us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things." So runs the Whitsuntide prayer for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, asking, surely, amongst other things, for that gift, not too common, alas! in the "religious world" of to-day, the gift of Common Sense. Is there any department of life where people so easily lay aside their Common Sense as in matters connected with the Bible and with religion? Even people of superior mental ability, clever students, keen men of business, people whose advice in the practical affairs of life would be most sagacious and valuable, are frequently found believing and acting in religious matters as if they had been but very sparingly endowed with practical wisdom. It would almost seem as if they thought it irreverent to judge by

the rules of Common Sense the meaning of the inspired writers or the systems of theology, however foolish, which men have evolved from them. There seems a vague notion in some minds that this Common Sense is rather a carnal and secular endowment, a very useful faculty in the guidance of every-day life, but not at all intended to meddle in the sacred province of religion ; in fact, that a capacity for the unquestioning reception of any kind of religious teaching has in it more of the nature of faith and of that "simplicity of a little child" so pleasing to God. Indeed, when rejecting certain interpretations of Scripture on the grounds of Common Sense, we are often met with the grave rebuke that such objections are of the carnal man and of the presumption of human reason.

And so it has come to this, that the Common Sense which God has given men to enable them to think rightly and see clearly in all other departments of life, by means of which the merchant succeeds in his business, and the philosopher is kept from absurd theories, and the whole world

is enabled to guide its steps in the countless details of daily life—that in religion alone, the most important province of all, this faculty is to be kept in the background.

Yet a very little consideration will show how vitally important it is in Bible reading to exercise our Common Sense. For the Bible is no formal system of teaching with every precept accurately defined and limited, and every exception carefully pointed out. It deals rather with broad principles than with particular precepts. We are trusted to apply those principles ourselves to the practical conduct of our lives. We find definite commands given to men in the Bible. Sometimes they are of universal application. Sometimes to take them literally would but lead to mistakes. Sometimes they are but the applying of broad principles to a particular case, which may or may not be similar to our own. Sometimes they are figurative, and intended to prescribe the spirit and temper of our lives rather than any particular action, as, for example, "Give to him that asketh thee," "If any man shall sue thee at the law, and

take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." Sometimes, again, they are general rules, subject to certain exceptions which the writer trusts our Common Sense to make. For instance, when children are told, "Obey your parents in *all* things," Common Sense reads "except your parents command what is wrong"; when we are told, "Submit yourselves to *every* ordinance of man," Common Sense says, "except when it contravenes the ordinance of God," as in the case of the apostles themselves, who promptly disobeyed the ordinance of their rulers forbidding them to preach Christ.

The same thing is true of the Types and Prophecies of Scripture. There are many events in its history that are typical of Christ, there are many prophecies whose fulfilment is a confirmation of our faith. But judgment and Common Sense are necessary in reading them, else the Bible will be belittled by the foolishness of men. Samson has been presented to us as a type of our Lord, and the scarlet thread of Rahab has been made to foreshadow the Blood of the Atone-

ment.[1] Elaborate proofs have been published that by the number 666 in the Apocalypse St. John must have indicated Napoleon, or Mr. Gladstone, or the Pope. Every important political crisis of the past century has been proved by some enthusiast to have been foretold by the prophet Daniel. Surely by a little Common Sense such things might have been avoided.

Again, it is the prominent teaching of all Scripture to any man who brings his Common Sense to its study, that nothing is more important

[1] One could fill hundreds of pages with illustrations of this tendency in all ages of the Church. The five rivers of Eden denoted the five senses. The planting of the garden in Eden meant the planting of virtue in humanity. "I laid me down and slept and rose again" (Psa. iii. 5) was, according to St. Augustine, a prophecy of the death and resurrection of Christ. The "two swords" meant the spiritual and temporal power of the Church. Even as early as the second century we have in the Epistle of Barnabas a fine example of this method in his explanation of Abraham's circumcising his 318 servants. He points out that the number 318 can be denoted by the Greek numeral letters ΤΙΗ. The ΙΗ, he says, stands for ΙΗσουϛ = JEsus. But what of the Τ? The Τ from its shape indicates the Cross. The whole is a symbolic prophecy of the Crucifixion! It is amusing to see the writer's satisfaction at this discovery. "No one," he says, "has been admitted by me to a more excellent piece of knowledge than this. But I know that ye are worthy."

in religion than the humble honest struggle in the path of right, the determination, regardless of all consequences, to "do justly and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." Yet in their eagerness to emphasise the freeness of God's grace some people seem willing to hold their Common Sense in abeyance. In spite of the acknowledged trend of the whole teaching of Scripture, in spite of the demand of Common Sense that Right-doing must be the highest Right, they see nothing strange in interpreting certain passages so as to make the struggle after righteousness almost unimportant. And so we find the popular religious notions drawn from the Bible that to be faithful in our duty is somehow of less importance than to be exact in our "views." Nay, we find scores of good people who have learned out of the Bible that under certain conditions the earnest effort to do our duty may even be a dangerous matter, may risk our losing all share in the Atonement of Christ. Men whose own lives show a constant and beautiful effort after the will of God are frequently heard perplexing the anxious struggler

after right by telling him that "trying is the road to hell, and trusting only is the road to Heaven." And who does not know the old revival hymn ?—

> "Doing is a deadly thing,
> Doing ends in death ;
> Cast your deadly doing down,
> Down at Jesu's feet."

No doubt those who teach such things have got hold of a side of truth that needs to be taught. The Bible is full of statements of the blessedness and strength that comes from trusting in Christ. It is continually comforting the poor frightened penitent with the thought that God is the Father longing for His child's return, that we do not need to pile up good works before coming for His forgiveness who is more anxious to receive us than we are to be received. It is most blessed, helpful teaching, but it is possible for foolish, well-meaning people to strain it to an absurdity that would overthrow the foundations of morality altogether. If men be sufficiently indolent and thoughtless, or sufficiently destitute of Common Sense, it is possible for them

to found almost any absurdity on statements of the Bible. The inspired writers express themselves quite freely, and usually without showing any anxiety to secure themselves from being misunderstood. They seem to assume that their readers will be sensible people. They see no need of constantly guarding and qualifying their statements, or reminding us that they are to be taken in connection with other statements made elsewhere. It is instructive to notice how almost reckless they are in this respect—if one may use such a word of men endowed with inspiration—so greatly do they seem to trust to the Common Sense of their readers. Surely they are not to blame for mistakes about the Bible if men will not use the faculties that God has given them.

It would be tedious to describe in detail the many other ways in which the absence of Common Sense shows itself in Bible reading. There is the thoughtless habit of quoting all parts of the Bible equally as "Scripture" whether they be the words of Our Lord and His apostles or the words of Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar

the Naamathite, who are afterwards represented as condemned and contradicted by God. There is the habit, too, in which preachers often set the bad example, of twisting the obvious meaning of words until the plain man fancies that the words of the Bible may be made to mean anything. And—perhaps one of the worst and commonest ways of all—there is the error dealt with in a later section, the use, for the support of doctrines, of isolated texts utterly regardless of the context or of the circumstances under which they were originally uttered.

Reader, in studying your Bible use your Common Sense. Believe that there is nothing impious or disrespectful in using it. Believe that there was Common Sense in the minds of the inspired writers, and that they had a Common Sense meaning for the words that they wrote. If Scripture is explained in a way that clashes with Common Sense, do not be one bit afraid to question such interpretation. Only be on your guard against irreverence and presumption. Be modest, be humble, be

reverent. Do not imagine your individual Common Sense to be the measure of all things. But be quite sure that the God who demands the use of this faculty in your ordinary life demands it just as well in your study of the Bible.

And do not be troubled at the responsibility that is laid on you of using your faculties in interpreting Scripture. That responsibility is laid on you by God. You must make up your mind that the necessity of using your Common Sense about the Bible is not a matter of accident but of God's design. In the lower stage of the education of men in the Old Testament they were still kept in some degree in leading strings. Definite laws were given and minute rules of conduct for special cases were prescribed. But in the New Testament it seems as if God were saying, "The childhood of the race is over, you must learn to walk alone." Instead of definite rules and creeds and cases of Conscience we have broad principles which we ourselves must apply —occasional sayings, sometimes seeming almost contradictory to each other, scattered here and

there through different books. Is it not because in this New Dispensation the fuller Pentecostal power is available for the illumining of the Mind and Conscience? Is it not because God wants us to exercise our Intellectual and Spiritual faculties more earnestly about eternal things, and that He expects that we shall all, to use the words of the apostle, "in understanding be men"?

When you pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to enable you to understand His Word, always remember that that help is given not only in the deepening of your affections and the quickening of your Conscience, but also in the clearing and illumining your mind. Therefore let it be one of your prayers as you open your Bible, "Grant us by the same Spirit to have a *right judgment in all things*, and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort."

IV.

ON USING OUR MORAL SENSE.

THIS must be a fundamental axiom in all interpretation of Scripture: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" or, to put the statement into other words, Every Christian man who prays to have his Conscience enlightened by the Holy Ghost is bound to use that Conscience in interpreting the Bible.

Conscience is to the soul what sight or taste is to the body. It is the Moral Sense, the organ of the Holy Spirit, the organ of perception of spiritual things. When we pray for a further enlightening by the Holy Spirit we are chiefly praying that Conscience should be brought into closer sympathy with God, that it should see more clearly God's standard of right, that it should recoil more sensitively from everything

wrong. And, as the eye cannot help distinguishing the colours of flowers, as the tongue cannot help distinguishing bitter from sweet, so Conscience, illumined by the power of the Holy Ghost, cannot help being keenly sensitive to the quality of actions or commands. This keen sensitiveness is the gift of God, and it is wrong to ignore it when interpreting God's Bible. Therefore, if men draw from that Bible doctrines from which Conscience recoils, that recoil is a strong indication that these men are in some way wrong. *It would of course not be safe to judge from the recoil of this or that man's individual Conscience*, lest there may be in them anything abnormal, just as it would not be safe to decide positively about a colour or taste on the evidence of the eyes or tongue of one or another individual, lest there might be colour blindness or insensibility of tongue. But it is quite safe to assert that if any interpretation of Scripture clashes with the universal Christian Conscience, *i.e.*, with the best men's highest sense of what is right and true, then the honest student of Scripture is

bound by his faith in God to question boldly the truth of such interpretation.

It is sad that it should be necessary to say this in a Christian land in this Nineteenth Century; but we cannot blind our eyes to the fact that it *is* necessary, and that much injury has been done to religion by the neglect of thus exercising faith in God, and of using the Conscience that God has given us, when interpreting the meaning of His Word. It has been often said that we must not venture to judge from our notions of right and wrong—that, even if we are told that a certain passage in Scripture means something which clashes with men's highest sense of what is generous and fair, yet "our shrinking, our moral repulsion of the doctrine must not weigh one jot—true faith will accept it without hesitation."

True faith, believe me, will do nothing of the kind. It is a most pernicious thing, subversive of all true religion, to speak thus of faith. True faith means faith in a Person, faith in a Character, faith in an infinite Justice, and Love, and Noble-

ness, and Generosity—faith in a God to whom it would be absolutely impossible that He should do anything unfair, or ungenerous, or unkind. This is the faith which you must pray for in your Bible reading—a faith that is taught you by the Bible itself—a faith that will keep you loyal to your Heavenly Father, jealous for His character, refusing to believe anything unworthy of Him.

Of course, it will be understood that here there is no question of doubting or believing the Bible, but only of doubting or believing *man's interpretation* of the Bible. The comparison, in the writer's mind, is that of a schoolboy reading in a letter from his father some passage which he cannot understand. A companion suggests an unworthy meaning which the words might bear, but the boy only smiles at such an interpretation; instinctively without hesitation he rejects it as untrue to his father's lofty character. If he can find no other meaning he prefers leaving the passage a mystery for the present. Who will deny that this is the highest faith, the truest loyalty to his absent father?

Let no one object that this is "a presumptuous setting up of the puny human Conscience to judge of the morality of the Word of God." To say this would show a misapprehension of the whole position. For is not the author of any book the best interpreter of that book? Is not the Holy Spirit the best interpreter of the Bible which He has inspired? Is not the Conscience, the organ of the Holy Spirit, the faculty by means of which He guides men towards the right? Is it presumptuous to use the human eye to recognise beauty or ugliness in Nature? Is it presumptuous to use the human ear to discern a jarring note in beautiful music? Are they not *God's appointed organs* for so doing? Why, then, should it seem presumptuous that earnest, reverent-minded Christian men who pray for the illumining and sensitising of Conscience by the Holy Ghost should use its indications of approval or recoil in judging how they ought to understand their Bible? Is it not *God's appointed method* for helping them to understand it?

Neither let any one object that this is to set up

our poor human reason as a criterion of God's wisdom. It is nothing of the kind. If I have a complete faith in the character of some one far wiser and better than myself, I shall be quite ready to believe that his action is right, even though the small part of the circumstances known to me are not sufficient to justify it. If I am told that certain things are done by God which puzzle me, *because* I do not know all the circumstances of the case as they appear to Him, but which would seem to me good in the highest degree if I did know all the circumstances —I can easily believe it. But if I am told that a certain passage in the Bible teaches us that God acts in a way which every honest mind must feel to be ungenerous and unfair, and which no conceivable further knowledge of the circumstances would show to be other than ungenerous and unfair, then I must refuse—I am bound by my loyalty to Him to refuse my belief to such an interpretation. If no other interpretation seems warranted by the words, I must leave it an unsolved difficulty for the present.

For example, if I read in Exodus that God told the Israelites to borrow of their neighbours "jewels of silver and jewels of gold" to spoil the Egyptians, and if I do not understand the solution of the difficulty,[1] I am, of course, bound to leave it unsolved rather than believe that its meaning is that God commanded an immoral action.

I read that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" and afterwards that He punished Pharaoh for this hardness of his heart. I read also that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. I may not understand what this hardening of Pharaoh's heart meant; but if anybody interprets it that God punished Pharaoh for what Pharaoh could not have helped, I must at once reject that meaning.

If I read in the ninth of Romans St. Paul's famous passage about God's election, and if any man should explain it to mean that God destines some men to eternal salvation and some to eternal hell, not for anything of good or ill that they have done, but for His now glory—to magnify Him-

[1] It may be worth noting that in the Revised Version, Exod. xi. 2, the word is translated "ask," not "borrow."

self—I am bound, if I have any real faith in God, to reject such a meaning without hesitation. It is mainly the Bible itself that has thus educated my Conscience and encouraged me to have this real faith in God. And a little further searching of that Bible justifies such fearless faith in this especial case by teaching me through another letter of this same writer that God "willeth that all men should be saved."[1] And so, though unable to reconcile the paradox, I can rest like a little child with heart at peace because I have refused to believe evil of God. I can patiently await the solution of the mystery. That there is an "election" must be true, since it is stated in the Bible. I may never in this world understand fully what it means, but I am bound by my faith in God to believe that if ever I do understand it, I shall see it to be just and fair and generous to all, perfectly consistent with the good Heart of Him who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" to save it.

It is necessary to write plainly about this

[1] 1 Tim. ii. 4, R.V.

matter even at the risk of being misunderstood. It is no true reverence, nay, it is a foolish superstition which would suppress the spiritual voice of Conscience and accept human interpretations of Scripture that are dishonouring to God. It has made sad many hearts that God has not made sad, and shaken the belief of thousands in the truth of revelation.

But in opposing false reverence it is all the more necessary anxiously to cultivate the true. Let there be no forgetting that we are but as children on the shores of the great ocean of truth. One thing we know with certainty, that God must be good. Let us hold loyally to that knowledge at all costs. Let not our knowledge be disturbed by our ignorance. But let not that knowledge lead us to shallow conceit and presumption. Young people and impulsive people on first realising that the utterance of Conscience in such matters has Divine authority are inclined to score out at once as mistakes and misapprehensions all the moral difficulties which confront them in the Bible. Some of us who have grown

older and less impulsive have learned to be more careful, finding that these difficulties may have often important teaching when men have become wise enough to understand it aright. For example, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, though a great difficulty to the superficial reader, is to the more patient and careful thinker a deep and solemn truth about God's laws of life and conduct. Therefore let us be humble and reverent and patient in dealing with moral difficulties. If we cannot see our way through them, let us be content to leave them aside as unsolved for the present. They are but a few dark spots that may wait for illumination. Amid the glory and beauty of the teaching around them they need shake no man's faith in God or in the inspiration of Scripture.

V.

ON STUDYING BY "TEXTS."

MR. RUSKIN, in his "Ethics of the Dust," cleverly hits off the method in which large numbers of good Christian people acquire their knowledge of the Bible. The way they read their Bibles, he says, is "just like the way the old monks thought that hedgehogs ate grapes. They rolled themselves (it was said) over and over where the grapes lay on the ground. What fruit stuck to their spines they carried off and ate. So your hedgehoggy readers roll themselves over and over their Bibles," and whatever texts first stick to their spines they carry off and feed on. But, he adds, "you can only get the skins of the texts that way; if you want their juice you must press them in cluster."

This is a very necessary warning to readers

of the Bible. Of course there is much advantage to be got from storing up the mind with texts, and it is an enormous gain to Christendom that the teaching of the Bible is capable of being so used. Many a man who could never remember a long passage or a difficult discussion is strengthened daily in his struggle towards the right by the little text which he has carried off to feed on from his morning Bible reading. There is no reason why he should discontinue so edifying a practice. Nay, rather every reason to the contrary. But he may need to be guarded against the very mischievous abuse of it in the habit of isolating a few words from their context and degrading them to the level of a fetish, not considering at all the special conditions which may limit their meaning or application.

It is obvious that the meaning of any passage may be very much modified by its immediate context, or by the main drift or purpose of the writing in which it occurs. It is possible so to present extracts out of any man's writings, that the writer would never recognise the statements as his own.

And this is, of course, as true of the Scriptures as of any other writings. Any one who has ever had to argue with this "hedgehoggy" class of Bible readers will remember many a text wrested from its connection and made to mean whatever the speaker desired. Most of the false theology and false ethics that prevail amongst Christians are due to this fertile source of error. Passages have been first separated from their context, the spirit of the whole evaporating in the process, and then a meaning has been read into them by the ardent advocate of some religious tenet quite foreign to the true meaning which they are seen to possess when considered in their proper context. Good men separating from the visible Church because its members are not perfect tell us of God's command: "Come ye out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing,"[1] quite oblivious of the fact that this was written to a notoriously faulty Church as a warning to keep separate from heathenism and its vices. Preachers who are too lazy to work at their sermons sometimes quote to

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 17.

themselves with pious unction, "It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak"[1]—words spoken to comfort poor persecuted disciples when their enemies should haul them up before governors and kings. The absolute fixedness of the soul's condition at death is proved from the latter half of a text in Ecclesiastes: "Where the tree falleth, there it shall be,"[2] though it is evident from the context and from the whole scope of the book that no such meaning is likely to have been intended by the writer. Emotional Christians of very questionable lives sometimes quote with great satisfaction to themselves, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," leaving out altogether the important qualification, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light,"[3] and the fact that the apostle is referring to Sanctification. A man can prove anything if he chooses to juggle in this way with the Bible. He can prove universal condemnation from the words, "Ye shall die in your sins," if he omit the preceding "Except ye believe." He can

[1] Matt. x. 19. [2] Eccles. xi. 3. [3] 1 John i. 7.

prove Atheism from the text, "There is no God,"[1] if he only leave out the accompanying words. He can make a pet system of theology for himself by making a mosaic of the texts which attract him and ignoring those that do not fit in with his scheme. He can take to pieces the noble mosaic of a king and form it again into the mosaic of a dog.[2]

We are dealing here with no imaginary evil. There are many good Christian people whose study of the Bible is mainly of this kind. They have no broad, intelligent grasp of the meaning of Scripture. They rarely take the trouble of following out an argument, or understanding the main drift of a long passage or a book of the Bible. They know a great many beautiful texts, but it is a very distorted, one-sided knowledge from their practice of dwelling on those texts which attract them, and ignoring those which do not fit in with their theological views. And all this not only

[1] Psa. liii. 1.

[2] The simile is from Irenæus in the second century (*Hacr.* I. 8. § 4). Even then this evil habit needed rebuke.

spoils the interest and profit of their Bible reading, but tends to bring discredit on the Bible itself. Why do we find such divergences of opinion gathered out of the same Bible? Why do we so often hear the flippant sneer that any one can prove what he pleases from Holy Scripture?

> "In religion
> What error is there but some sober brow
> Will bless it and approve it with a text?"

Why? Just because of this vicious method of gathering separate detached little statements and looking upon them as standards of truth, because instead of pressing the grapes in the cluster, men will pick them out separately as fancy dictates.

The more thoughtful reader of his Bible will be on his guard against this error. He will not be content with merely finding nice "texts" in his daily Bible reading. He will try to grasp the sense of the passage before him as a whole. If the sense seem incomplete he will look back to the preceding passage. When a certain text is presented to him as a proof of some doctrine, he will by no

means accept it at once as conclusive. He will examine the context in which it occurs and try to see if the writer had such doctrine in his mind. If it be a text from the Old Testament, he will remember the progressive nature of Revelation and examine if it be in accord with the fuller teaching of Christ. In a word, he will try to take account of the whole tenor of Scripture, and not gather its meaning from separate "texts."

VI.

ON ONE-SIDED TRUTHS.

In connection with this subject of studying by texts will best come in the following question which has sometimes been a puzzle to simple readers of the Bible. What are we to do with statements in Scripture that conflict or seem to conflict with each other? As for example:—

A	B
Eph. ii. 8, 9.—"By grace are ye saved through faith . . . not of works, lest any man should boast."	Jas. ii. 14.—"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he have faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"
Rom. iii. 28.—"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."	Jas. ii. 24.—"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only."
Luke xiii. 24.—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate."	Rom. ix. 16.—"It is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."
Rev. xxii. 18.—"Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."	John iv. 44.—"No man can come unto Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him."

PSA. clxv. 9.—"The Lord is loving unto every man."	PSA. vii. 11.—"God is angry with the wicked every day."
PROV. xxvi. 4.—"Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him."	PROV. xxvi. 5.—"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."
MATT. xii. 30.—"He that is not with Me is against Me."	MARK ix. 40.—"He that is not against us is on our part."
JOHN xiv. 27.—"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you."	MATT. x. 34.—"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."
MATT. xv. 24.—"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."	JOHN iii. 16.—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

How are we to understand these opposing statements? If one of them contains the truth does it not seem as if the other were opposed to the truth?

We must learn that neither of the two as opposed to the other contains the full truth. Each by itself is but a side of truth, and both the

opposing sides are necessary, limiting and qualifying each other, to make the truth complete. The neglect of this fact has been a fruitful source of error since the Christian Church began. One party arose and took one side of a truth to be the whole, exaggerating it to the complete neglect of the opposite side; and then another party, perceiving the falsehood of this exaggeration, was tempted to assert the neglected side with equally undue prominence. And so what should have been a perfect truth became two opposing errors. Thus one party took one side of the truth about Grace and Freewill, another took the other side, and of course both went wrong. One set of Christians took exclusively the texts I have marked (A), and another the texts marked (B) with regard to Faith and Works, and in the same way both went wrong. Many like instances might be given. Wherever there are two sides of a truth, and men take one and neglect the other, it must always lead to error. It is only by combining the separate fragments of truth that we shall arrive at a conception of the truth itself. "The

friends of Truth," to use Milton's exquisite simile,[1] "imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, go up and down still gathering up limb by limb as they can find them. We have not yet found them all nor ever shall do till her Master's second coming; He shall bring together every joint and member and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection."

Were it not for the mechanical notions in vogue about Inspiration there would be no difficulty in seeing why truths in the Bible should often be stated in this seemingly conflicting way. It is the natural way in which we expect men ordinarily to state such truths now. We are quite accustomed to hear different teachers or the same teacher on different occasions emphasise now one, now another side of a truth, according as circumstances make it necessary. Take, for example, the two sides of the truth about Faith and Works as expressed in the apparently opposing texts which I have quoted. If a man were dealing with

[1] *Areopagitica*, p. 89. Bohn's Edition.

earnest penitents making themselves miserable in their struggles to win God's favour by piling up good actions to their account and always fearing that at last God would reject them if they had not done enough to appease Him, he surely ought to emphasise the truth that God is a thousand times more concerned for their salvation than they themselves are ; that God cannot bear to let them perish ; and that nothing is so pleasing to Him as that poor penitents in their position should come to Him with simple, trustful faith, even as a little child comes to its father. It is by grace, that is by God's free favour, and not by their own deservings, that they are saved at all.

But suppose this same teacher by and by has to do with people of an opposite tendency, whose religion consists in mere talk about their "saving faith," who justify their frequent lapses into meanness and impurity and ill-temper by persuading themselves that they had once been "converted," that they are "God's people," that they have faith in the Atonement of Christ for their sins, that God looking down on their lives looks not at their

righteousness which is "filthy rags," but at the finished righteousness of Christ in which they trust. Then surely that teacher would be bound sternly to impress on them the other side of the Bible's teaching about Faith and Works. He would have to show them that character is in God's sight the one thing of supreme importance for men; that the forming of noble character is the great purpose of God's plan of Redemption; that that was no real faith which was not showing itself in efforts after a beautiful life. In a word, he would have to teach them as St. James taught of old, "Faith if it hath not works is dead."[1]

And no one would ever think him inconsistent for so teaching. It would be just the natural thing for him to do. Why then should it not be the natural thing for the inspired writers to do? Some people seem to expect that in Revelation God ought to have given us a series of absolute truths, each complete and perfect of itself, never needing to be qualified or limited in any way whatsoever. But should we wonder if He chose instead the

[1] James ii. 17.

more simple, beautiful way of humanising His truth by passing it through the minds of men, and thus letting these men tell it to their fellows in the easy, natural, human way in which they are accustomed to tell them other things?

PART IV.

ON STUDYING WITH THE HEART—DEVOTIONALLY.

I.

DEVOTIONAL STUDY.

AN ancient orator once laid down a motto for his pupils which might equally serve as a motto for students of the Bible—

"PLACERE—DOCERE—MOVERE,"

i.e., interest and please in order that you may teach—*teach* in order that you may *move*. However important it be to interest oneself in the Bible, however important thoroughly to teach oneself its meaning, all is but a mere preliminary to the great object of Bible reading—to move the heart, to rouse the affections toward the love of God and the will towards the effort after the blessed life.

In these days one sometimes sees reason to think that this needs to be more emphasised. There is a good deal of intellectual interest about the Bible, a good deal of discussion about inspiration and the so-called "Higher Criticism," a good deal of information popularised about the geography and history and climate and habits of ancient Palestine. No Bible seems complete now without having a little volume of "Helps" or "Notes" bound up with it, giving assistance towards understanding its allusions and thinking oneself into the position of the characters depicted. And all this is most valuable if kept in its right subordinate place. But it *must* be so kept. The reader must not permit himself to call this "Bible study." It is only the intellectual side of it. It is only the preliminary to the real object which is the spiritual feeding upon the Word of God. However much interest and information it produces, that day's Bible reading is wasted which gives no light or strength for the battle of life—no increase in the knowledge of God—no stirring of the

affections toward Him—no vision of duty which we are resolved to do.

Therefore it is with solemn purpose that we should approach the Bible. We should open it reverently, feeling that it is no ordinary book, but the special medium of God's communication with our souls. We should cultivate a certain feeling of awe with regard to it, only taking care that this does not tend to mere superstition or hamper our free, intelligent study. The main consideration at the close of each reading should be, "What are the special lessons which the Holy Spirit has for me in this passage of Scripture?"

For this devotional study of Scripture, just as for the intellectual study, it is necessary to take pains. It is necessary as we take up the Bible to pause for a little, to try to detach our minds from the world, to prepare our hearts by a moment of prayer and of effort to get into the right attitude for approaching its teaching. It is necessary as we lay it down to make the attempt at meditation on that which we have read. With some of us this will be no easy matter. The mind will try

to wander off, and it will require a firm, deliberate, persistent effort to form the habit of keeping our attention fixed even for the few minutes that we can devote to it. Do not be discouraged, reader, because of that. Remember it is as hard for many others as it is for you, and that the discouragement of failure is not peculiar to yourself. Remember that God is in sympathy with the effort. He knows it is not easy for you, and He is ready to help you. Remember, too, that many to whom it was once as difficult and discouraging have by prayer and pains and perseverance won that habit of earnest, attentive meditation which is now to them such a strengthening and refreshing of their souls.

Again, let me anticipate the objection which I fear will be frequent, that you are not an idle person with abundant leisure for study and meditation, and that you cannot give the time that is necessary for all this. Much time is not necessary. There are very few who cannot devote a quarter of an hour daily to a matter of such vital importance to their religious life, and

even in that time, if no more can be had, it is possible to do all that is suggested. What is really needed is not so much more time, but more realising of the importance of this, and more earnest resolution in carrying it out. Pray that this may be granted to you. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

II.

"ACQUAINT THYSELF WITH GOD."

"How can I learn to trust God? How can I learn to love Him and enjoy His presence as some people seem to do?" Which of us is there with any reality in his life who has not cried that cry again and again?

Perhaps it may help you, reader, to ask you another question, in reply—How did you learn to love and trust your own nearest and dearest—your father or mother, your wife, your husband, your intimate friend? Was it not that you learned to KNOW them by constant intercourse—that slowly, by degrees, their character was revealed to you, and thus you got to love them so, that you would give your very life for them, you got to believe in them so, that this day you would fearlessly trust your all in their keeping?

Well, it is just in the same way you must learn to love and trust God. There is only one way for learning to love or trust anybody, God or man, *by learning to know them*, by becoming intimately *acquainted with their characters*.

Therefore must this be the prominent purpose in all your reading of Scripture—you must study the Bible and especially the Gospels, not chiefly to understand doctrines and explain prophecies, and be wise in religious theories; no, but first and chiefest of all to acquaint yourself with God, to understand God's character, to get into touch with the heart of Jesus Christ. Always remember that *knowing* God has the same meaning as knowing your friend—an acquaintance with His character, such as must win your affection and esteem. The chief object of the Bible is to impart this. And this is the thing above all others that is of vital consequence to you, this will be your joy and peace if you can attain to it.

Surely the attainment cannot be impossible to him who prayerfully and earnestly sets himself in his Bible reading to know God. In the Old

Testament he finds the growing revelation of a Father pitying His children, firmly visiting their offences with the rod, yet pleading and striving with them that they should not destroy themselves. Is it hard to love and reverence such an One as that? In the New Testament he finds the fuller manifestation in the great, tender, large-hearted Man—who scorned none but the shams and hypocrites, who never thought of Himself from the cradle to the Cross, where He laid down His life for the sake of His brethren. Is it hard to trust Jesus Christ of Nazareth when you get to know Him? Is it hard to care for One of whom such beautiful, helpful stories are told—of sorrowful, repentant women weeping for very love of Him—of poor despised publicans with no one else to say a good word for them received by Him as friends—of innocent little children crowding round His knee—of broken-hearted mothers receiving back their dead—of troubled, friendless, weary people hanging on His words of loving sympathy, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"?

Could we not reverence and love—aye, love enthusiastically—such a man as that if He lived in our midst to-day, AND IF WE KNEW HIM as we know our closest friend? It is the only thing that matters much—thus knowing God. It is well to know obscure prophecies, and to be able to solve the difficulties of the Old Testament. It is very good to have clear views about Justification and Sanctification, and the Atonement for sin; but all must be held of minor importance to the great object of the study of the Bible, "to KNOW THEE the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

III.

"HE THAT WILLETH TO DO, HE SHALL KNOW."

IF you would rightly learn from your Bible the teaching that God designs for you, you must give good heed to this condition laid down by Jesus Christ—purity of purpose—the honest desire, at any cost, to do the right as far as you know it. "If any man willeth," said He, "to *do* God's will he shall *know* of the teaching" (John vii. 17, R.V.). The same truth as to the connection between *knowing* and *doing* is frequently stated elsewhere in Scripture. "The *secret* of the Lord is with them that *fear* Him."[1] The Holy Ghost "is given to them that *obey* Him."[2] "Every one that *loveth* is born of God and *knoweth* God; he that loveth not knoweth not God,"[3] &c.

It is a valuable lesson—an encouraging lesson

[1] Psa. xxv. 14. [2] Acts v. 32. [3] 1 John iv. 7, 8.

too—that spiritual knowledge is the reward of obedience; that the essential condition of profitable Bible reading is not extensive learning or powerful intellect, or accurate scholarship in Hebrew and Greek—very important though they be—but rather this, which is within the power of every one of us, the honest desire to *do* God's will when we know it.

Have you never wondered, as you heard of some great scholar studying the Gospels and finding in them only foolishness and falsehood? Perhaps the wonder may be here explained. Or have you never envied some uneducated old man, some simple humble woman whose Bible was a daily profit and delight, who could see more clearly and make you feel more effectively the fatherhood of God and the beauty and nobleness of Jesus Christ than many a brilliant trained theologian? Did the question arise in your heart, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" or did you understand the great law of spiritual knowledge revealed by Christ—"He that willeth to do, he shall know"?

Live truly if you would see truly. That is the golden rule for the student of Holy Scripture. There are states of the soul in which (if I may say it) God seems unwilling to reveal to us His truth, even though we know the words of the Bible from beginning to end. If we are wilfully indulging some evil habit—selfishness, uncharitableness, laziness, impurity—if we desire more to be orthodox than to be good ; if we care more for reading God's truth than for doing it ; if we contend for our own little notions about that truth with sharpness and bitterness—then we are unfit to learn the truth. These are the things that blind men's eyes and make their ears dull of hearing the teaching of the Spirit of God. Let us care, above all things, that ours, if not the "honest *and good*" heart, should at least be the honest heart, with all its faults humbly desiring to know the truth in order to do it ; and there will grow within us a Divine intuition, a spiritual instinct, which is, after all, but another name for the Illumination of the Holy Ghost, showing us, as we read, the teaching of God.

IV.

STUDY REGULARLY.

No spiritual life can be healthy without a daily study of God's Word. No Bible reading can be interesting that is not regular. If you only read by fits and starts at irregular intervals, when you have time, you must not blame your Bible for its want of interest to you. This must be clear to any one who thinks about it. When you have entered on the study of a book in the way already suggested, and have learned something about the author and his meaning, and his purpose in writing, and are able in some degree to "put yourself in his place," and understand the connection of his thoughts, you are getting into the right attitude for being interested in the book. But, of course, if you fail to read it regularly, all these clear outlines forming in your mind become blurred again, and the book must lose its interest

and its usefulness. The Bible is in nowise peculiar in this. The most fascinating novel, if it had to be read in fits and starts, and with long intervals between the readings, would soon become very wearisome taskwork.

Let us be honest, and confess that our excuse about want of time is *but an excuse*. Even ten minutes of honest study every day would be an important help to our lives. Does it not almost seem at times as if God *must* get tired of our laziness in this matter, as if He were saying—"I want to fill your life with spiritual blessing by means of your Bible reading, but you will not give me time to do anything for you. I want to feed you full with the 'children's bread,' yet you scarce get even the crumbs that fall from the Master's table." Reader, let us try to be in earnest. Let us determine in God's strength to trample down under our feet this laziness that is so spoiling and impoverishing our lives. Let us decide—"this day I begin a regular systematic study of my Bible, and by God's help I will keep to it and make time for it."

V.

STUDY PRACTICALLY.

"MAKE it the first morning business of your life," says Mr. Ruskin, "to understand some part of the Bible clearly, and make it your daily business to obey it in all that you do understand."

We have already thought about the need of earnest devotional meditation on the daily passage of Scripture. By means of it the emotions will be called into play—love, or gratitude, or awe, or fear, or indignation against the treacherous wiles of the devil. Encourage this exercise of the emotional side of your nature. We have, most of us, too little of it in our spiritual life But value above all the practical side, the exercise of the *will* with regard to the Scripture before you. Seek in it for some indications of your duty. Make every meditation end with a resolve.

When, by means of your daily Bible reading, God reveals any duty to your soul, resolve that you will do that duty as quickly as you can, however unpleasant it may be. It is thus men keep open to their hearts the avenue for the Spirit of God. You have no right to expect any further revelation from Him till you have decided to attend to that one, for any revealed duty that is neglected becomes an obstacle blocking up His path. When that is attended to you will soon get further revelations. Every good deed you do will be rewarded by the discovery of another to be done, and the desire to do it; and as each is done the love of God's will will be growing in your heart, and the promise of Christ will be verified in your experience, "If any man love Me he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and *keep* it."

VI.

STUDY PRAYERFULLY.

THE mere injunction to prayer I should scarcely think necessary for any one who desires spiritual profit in his Bible reading as I assume the readers of this book to do. But it may be well to offer a suggestion as to the method of this prayer. First, I think a quick effort to realise the Divine presence and an earnest lifting up of the heart in some such words as are written below ; then the careful study of the appointed portion seeking the lessons which God designs for you, especially seeking any light on God's character or your own duty, and then, as far as may be, TURNING THE PASSAGE ITSELF OR THE CHIEF THOUGHTS THAT ARISE FROM IT INTO PRAYER. This latter, I think, is of the greatest importance. Bible study thus becomes a real communion with God. God and

man are opening their hearts to each other. God is speaking to the man in His Word. The man is speaking back of the very things that God has told him. It is just what conversation, what communion should be. And this is much more feasible than may appear at first sight. Indeed, when the reader has accustomed himself to seek them, not many days will pass in which he cannot find at least some thoughts in his daily reading to send back to God in the form of prayer.

PRAYERS.

COME, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.

✠

Lord, open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.

✠

Sanctify me through Thy truth, Thy Word is truth.

✠

Blessed Spirit of Truth, guide me into all truth.

✠

Let the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.

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O Lord Jesu Christ our God, open Thou the ears and eyes of my heart that I may hear Thy words and understand and follow Thy commandments, for I am a stranger, O Lord, upon the earth; O hide not Thou Thy commandments from me (*St. Chrysostom*).

✠

May it please Thee, good Lord, to grant us increase of grace to hear meekly Thy Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.

✠

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of Thy Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

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